

**Amherst Committee on Homelessness**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**November 10, 2010**  
**Police Station Community Room**  
**10:00 AM**

The meeting was called to order by Ms. Simula at 10:20.

**Present:** Ms. Alisa Brewer (Select Board liaison) (in part), Mr. Kevin Eddings, Ms. Manire-Gatti (in part), Mr. Michael Giles (in part), Ms. Hwei-Ling Greeney, Ms. Reikka Simula, Mr. David Ziomek (Town staff liaison) (in part)

**Absent:** Mr. Jon Nelms, Ms. Laura Quinn

**Also in attendance:** Mr. Jay Levy (Elliot Community Human Services) (in part), Ms. Stephanie O'Keefe (Select Board), Ms. Meg Wright (Elliot Community Human Services) (in part)

**1. 2010-2011 winter shelter at FBC – Jack Desroches**

Ms. Simula announced that Mr. Desroches was unable to attend.

The Temporary Overnight Shelter permit has been secured and will be in effect from November 15 to December 24. The shelter will close every eighth night between those dates: November 22 and 30, and December 8 and 16. Mr. Desroches would like to operate the shelter from 9 PM to 8 AM, although this needs the approval of the First Baptist Church.

Ms. Wright advised the Committee that she will be providing social services at the Shelter on Mondays from 9:00 to 10:30 PM. Mr. Levy added that Ms. Wright also provides these services to guests of the shelter at other hours in other locations.

Ms. Greeney advised the Committee that Amherst Community Connections provides guests with counseling on housing, employment, and food stamps four nights per week from 9 to 11.

Ms. Simula conveyed a message from Mr. Desroches encouraging Committee members to visit the shelter whenever they are able.

10:32 AM. Mr. Ziomek arrived.

10:35 AM. Ms. Alisa Brewer arrived.

Mr. Ziomek advised the Committee that construction to bring in a 6" water line to the shelter began on November 15, and that sprinkler installation has begun. Mr. Gates of the FBC believes this work will be completed by December 4 or 5. Mr. Ziomek believes that on each of the eighth consecutive nights he can arrange for keeping the shelter open through local approvals, which he is pursuing, or for accommodations for guests at shelters in other towns, or for the shelter to serve as a warming place then.

Ms. Greeney said she spoke with Ms. DeBerry about the Northampton shelter providing accommodations on these nights, who told her this would have to be on a space available basis. Ms. Wright noted that the Northampton shelter is often full. Mr. Levy added that some Amherst guests "won't go over the bridge."

Mr. Eddings noted that in light of the multiple good faith efforts to comply with state regulations governing the shelter...the provision of two staff and volunteers who remain awake all night, prohibition of smoking and candles, installation of smoke and CO detectors, the progress being made on sprinkler and shower installation...and the shelters proximity to the police and fire stations and its first floor location, if a waiver of the requirement that it close every eighth night can be obtained. Mr. Ziomek replied that he is uncertain if this can be done locally or by the State or at all. Mr. Levy said he believes the Town has the discretion to enforce or not enforce the regulation regarding closure of the shelter on the eighth night.

Mr. Ziomek said that he has been assured that staff will be ready to open the shelter every night at 9 PM and that it will not close any morning before 8 AM.

Ms. Simula requested that the contract signed by the Town and service provider be distributed electronically to Committee members. Mr. Ziomek said he believes the contract, like the RFQ, is a public document.

Ms. Simula distributed a draft flyer advertising the shelter, intended for posting in places that people who need such a service will see it. Mr. Ziomek encouraged the Committee to contact Mr. Desroches about the flyer and said the Town will issue a press release to clarify the shelter's opening date. Ms. Greeney said she would contact Mr. Desroches about the flyer, and send it electronically to the Survival Center and the Northampton drop-in center. Mr. Levy offered to provide copies to social service advisors at Elliot.

Mr. Eddings discussed his proposal for a shelter support/oversight group comprised by a representative(s) of the Town, service provider, shelter host, Committee on Homelessness, and guests of the shelter. Mr. Ziomek suggested that such a committee be efficient and time sensitive. Ms. Simula noted that no process for resolution of grievances and complaints was established in the RFQ nor, she believes, in the contract with the service provider. Mr. Giles said he believes such a procedure should begin with Mr. Desroches. Mr. Ziomek said that Mr. Desroches wants guests to come directly to him directly, saying "The buck stops there."

Mr. Levy emphasized the importance of a formal and mechanism, known to all parties, of addressing conflicts and issues arising at the shelter. This can be done, he said, through the proposed committee, which would allow for problem resolution in a climate of collaboration and free the Committee on Homelessness from over-involvement and the appearance of attempting to "micromanage the shelter."

Mr. Eddings said that the consequences of lack of both oversight and a conflict resolution mechanism at the shelter last year led him to make the proposal, adding that he believes it would be a time-saving strategy for all parties and keep problems out of the press as soon as they arise.

Ms. Brewer questioned if the proposal, if adopted, might place the Committee in a role not in its charge, and appear threatening to the service provider. She recommended that the Committee proceed carefully with it, going through Milestone Ministries first. Mr. Giles added that it was important not to approach the other proposed committee members as if this were a "done deal". He suggested noting to them the problems at the shelter last year and present this as a way to prevent their recurrence..."It's not in the contract, but here is what the Committee sees as a reasonable solution."

11:40. Ms. Manire-Gatti arrived. Ms. Wright departed.

Mr. Eddings suggested that the Committee designate one or two members to prepare and come back with a more detailed proposal.

Ms. Brewer suggested the Chair have an informal conversation with Mr. Desroches without a formal proposal in hand...“This happened last year. What do we do when guests come to us? We need a mechanism to respond to complaints that reach us.”

Ms. Greeney moved that Mr. Eddings approach Mr. Desroches about designing a mechanism to obtain feedback from shelter guests and enhance communication among all constituencies involved with the shelter. Mr. Giles seconded. **The motion was approved** unanimously.

Mr. Ziomek informed the Committee that Mr. Desroches is requiring that members of the Committee, the Select Board, and Town staff that would like to visit the shelter to notify him or Eric Donaldson in advance. Mr. Desroches feels that “the shelter is not a fishbowl” and he does not want people “gawking”.

He also advised members of the Committee to be aware of potential conflicts of interest, an obvious one being both serving on the Committee and receiving a paycheck from Milestone Ministries. He reminded the Committee that all members must take an oath at the Clerk’s office.

11:58 AM. Mr. Levy departed.

Mr. Giles asked about the potential for proselytization at the shelter. Mr. Ziomek replied that the law is clear that it is not permitted there, and that this prohibition is also stated in the contract. There must be, he said, temporal and physical separation between contracted services and faith-based services, including counseling.

Mr. Ziomek reminded the Committee of the Community Development Committee’s (CDC) regular meeting this afternoon at 4:30, followed by its public hearing at 5:30. At the hearing, he said, the CDC will present its preliminary recommendations for 2011 Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), take public comments on them, then finalize its recommendations to the Select Board and Town Manager. Its preliminary recommendation is to award \$200,000 for the purchase of the West St. property, and \$25,000 for a study of affordable housing in Amherst. The Town, he said, may do the pre-development work of the proposed affordable housing on that property, and turn over development to a private contractor.

Ms. Simula encouraged members to attend the CDC hearing this afternoon. She would like to see the CDC reduce its award for Main St. infrastructure and improvements, which are bondable, and allocate more funds for the purchase of the West St. property. Ms. Greeney noted that the asking price for the property is \$325, 000.

##### **5. 12:05 PM. CPAC 2011 application – David Ziomek**

Mr. Ziomek reminded the Committee of the December 10 deadline for submitting proposals the Community Preservation Act Committee.

12:10 PM. Mr. Giles departed.

Mr. Ziomek asked that by its next meeting the Committee provide him with input into preparation of the Request for Proposals to conduct a feasibility study for housing for those of extremely low income. He would like to have recommendations on the location of such housing, number of buildings, number of units, etc.

Ms. Simula asked for Mr. Ziomek's support of her proposal to reallocate 2011 CDBG funds to the purchase of the West St. property, noting that less than half the amount of the 2010 CDBG award for housing for those of extremely low income, which was reallocated for other purposes, has been proposed by the CDC for that purpose in 2011.

Mr. Ziomek replied that part of the expense of the Main St. project will be covered by the bond authorization approved by fall Town Meeting, and that the West St. property is not nearly worth its asking price. He cautioned that the amount of money available for a purchase influences the asking price of the owner, and that it is "not a good practice" to pay more than the appraised value of a property, "5 to 10% may be O.K." The CDC makes its funding recommendations to the Town Manager, he explained, and it is his decision what to fund.

Ms. Simula asked how last year's CDBG award for housing for those of extremely low income was reapportioned. Mr. Ziomek replied that he was not sure, and will ask Mr. Rosenblatt. Regarding the development of affordable housing on the Hawthorne property, the Town, he said, is "back to square one. We don't have a (illegible in minutes) to approach anyone about developing affordable housing there."

Ms. Brewer said that the Committee "can't just say that the next \$450,000 (in CDBG funding) be made available for this project," adding that it's important that projects proposed to CDC are ready to go forward. Mr. Ziomek noted that CDBG funding for the homeless shelter increased from \$75,000 last year to \$100,000 this year. He pointed out that the Survival Center's, whose plans for its new home were not far enough along and thus did not receive an award, will be ready next year. He also noted that the Town's Mini Entitlement Community status, which allows it to apply to the State for CDBG funding, is not automatic. Amherst must reapply for that designation in 2012. If approved, Amherst may then apply for CDBG funds in 2012 and 2013.

Ms. Greeney reminded the Committee of the December 10 deadline for submitting proposals to the Community Preservation Act Committee. Mr. Ziomek said that Town staff will prepare the application for CPA funding for the West St. property acquisition for affordable housing. He asked the Committee for a letter of support for this, and requested that the Chair reach out to the Fair Housing-Housing Partnership Committee to provide one as well. He added that the Town has not yet determined the mix of extremely low income, low income, and moderate income housing it will pursue on the site, should it be purchased. Ms. Greeney requested that the CPA application include a request for funds to cover predevelopment expenses of the property.

12:32 PM. Ms. Greeney moved to approve the minutes from the October 7 meeting. Ms. Manire-Gatti seconded. **The motion was approved** unanimously.

Ms. Greeney moved to approve the minutes from the October 21 meeting. Ms. Manire-Gatti seconded. **The motion was approved** unanimously.

12:34 PM. A motion was made to adjourn. Ms. Manire-Gatti seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

The next meetings of the Committee are scheduled for November 23 (Tuesday), and December 9 and 30.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Eddings, Secretary